

Te Reo Maòhi en français: Polynesian Language, Storytelling, and Traditions in the French Polynesian Novels of Chantal Spitz

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Chantal Spitz, whose *Île des rêves écrasés* (1991) was heralded as the first novel published by a Polynesian author, retools literary French to reflect a French Polynesian voice. In her two published novels, she includes long passages in Polynesian, or *te reo maòhi*, uses Polynesian phrases, images, myths and figures of speech to describe her world.

Spitz's works have an international audience. The award-winning 2007 translation of *Île des rêves écrasés* was published in New Zealand as *Island of Shattered Dreams*; *Hombo* (2002) is used as a Polynesian text in several New Zealand and American University courses on the literature of French Polynesia. A web page dedicated to the novel allows readers direct contact with the author. Her newest novel, *Elles, Terre d'Enfance, Roman à deux encres* (2011) is new enough that its effect on the literary world is still unknown, though it is already available for purchase in French Polynesia, France, Canada and the United States in its original French edition from the Tahitian publisher *Au vent des Îles*. Despite the international availability of her work, Spitz considers the people of French Polynesia as her primary audience. Through her writings and the literary magazine that she edits, she writes to awaken a renewed sense of cultural pride and autonomy in French Polynesia.

Spitz draws from Polynesian myth and storytelling traditions in her use of the magical realism of the mythical realm, the power of words used in their original language, the moral conflict between tradition and modernity, and the call to retrieve and conserve the knowledge of the past. In her novels, traditional Western literary devices are re-tooled to fit political ends and the languages of the post-colonial powers become the means to communicate to a wider world audience. The voices of people who have largely remained unheard resonate in these works.